

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 237 472

SP 023 259

AUTHOR Driscoll, Amy; And Others
TITLE Teachers' Self-Descriptions and Descriptions of Students to Whom They're Attached and Whom They Reject.
PUB DATE Sep 83
NOTE 37p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Montreal, Canada, April 11-15, 1983).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Information Analyses (070) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Education; Elementary School Teachers; *Emotional Response; Interpersonal Relationship; Personality Assessment; Personality Traits; Physical Characteristics; *Self Concept; Sex Differences; *Student Characteristics; *Student Teacher Relationship; *Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Behavior

ABSTRACT

A study explored teachers' descriptions of themselves and of children to whom they were attached or for whom they felt rejection. Forty-two elementary classroom teachers (11 male and 31 female) from 16 different schools identified 3 "attachment" students and 3 "rejection" students using 5 personality descriptors and 5 physical descriptors. Two months later, the teachers described themselves using identical physical and personality checklists. Results were categorized in four groups: (1) traits teachers as a group felt they do or do not exhibit; (2) general traits of those children to whom teachers were attached and those they rejected; (3) traits which were the most disparate between the two groups of children; and (4) differences in teacher sex and student attachment and/or rejection. Results indicated that teachers were more likely to indicate attachment for students they perceived to be like themselves; however, while this was generally the case, teachers who had a negative self-image tended to reject students like themselves. Physical traits did not influence teacher attitudes to a great extent. Male teachers tended to attach to more female students and reject more male students than did female teachers. (JD)

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ED237472

Teachers' Self-Descriptions
and Descriptions of Students
To Whom They're Attached
and Whom They Reject

Amy Driscoll
Carol Lubomudrov
Ralph Reynolds

Department of Educational Studies
University of Utah

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INTRODUCTION

No matter how homogeneous a classroom appears, the range of differences in interactions between teachers and students is vast and complex. Teachers praise some students more frequently than others, wait on some students for answers longer than others and/or direct more complex questions to some students rather than others. The influence of teacher attitudes on teacher/student interaction differences has been established by research. Two attitudes which have been defined and investigated for their impact on interaction inequalities are teacher attachment and teacher rejection. The teacher behaviors associated with these attitudes have been described and documented; however, the formation of these attitudes is a process minimally understood and explored in educational research. One salient source of information for an understanding of attitude formation is the student. Physical and personality characteristics of students have been studied in relation to attitude formation in teachers. Data on student characteristics is abundant and has been reported regularly in terms of teacher attitude categories. It is in stark contrast to the paucity of data on teacher characteristics. Research has begun to indicate that student characteristics affect teachers' perceptions of students and influences their response to them. The effect of teachers' self-perceptions on their perception of student's characteristics has not been addressed.

The purposes of the present study are:

- 1) to identify characteristics teachers use to describe both themselves and the students toward whom they have positive and negative attitudes,
- 2) to examine the extent to which teacher perceptions of themselves are mirrored in their descriptions of students toward whom they hold positive and negative attitudes,
- 3) to explore differences in the previously described areas (1 and 2) between male and female teachers, and male and female students.

For purposes of this study, two student groups will be discussed. These groups are differentiated by the teacher attitude which is communicated directly and indirectly toward these students. The early work of Jackson, Silberman and Wolfson (1969), found several common themes in analyzing teachers' comments about individual students. One pattern noted was the degree to which teachers liked or disliked students. This led to a follow-up study of teacher behavior toward specific types of students and the identification of teacher attitudes toward those student types. Two of those attitudes are attachment and rejection. The former targets children teachers would like to keep in their classrooms and the latter identifies students which teachers would like to have removed from their classes.

The subtle, but potentially powerful, effects of students' physical traits on teachers' perceptions and judgments have been explored with intensity by both social psychologists and educators. Bercheid and Walster (1978) have documented that physical appearance can affect the attitudes that others hold about people. If teachers are susceptible to these same biases, wide-ranging effects could be noted in their classroom behaviors toward individual students. Clifford and Walster (1973) found that attractive children of both sexes were judged to be more interested in school, more likely to succeed, more intelligent, more popular with classmates and as having parents who were more interested in education. In a similar study, Dion (1972) found that transgressions were evaluated less severely when committed by an attractive child. More recently, Rich (1975) found that attractive children received more desirable personality ratings and more lenient evaluations for misbehavior. Despite agreement in these and other studies (Marwit, Marwit & Waller, 1978; Demeis & Turner, 1978) that physical attractiveness enhances positive impressions and behavioral responses in others, it must be noted that the described research includes relatively artificial experiments in impression formation. Few naturalistic studies of the reactions of real teachers to their real students have been conducted. The work of LaVoie and Adams (1974) and Clifford (1975) demonstrate that data from artificial experiments may not

generalize to interactions between teachers and students. The Student Attribute Study (Brophy, Evertson, Anderson & Crawford, 1981) established that physical attractiveness is not a major factor determining the quantity or quality of teacher-student interaction.

Another consideration when exploring the source of teacher attitude toward individual students is student personality. Teacher preferences for certain student personality traits and behavioral expression of those preferences have been studied extensively with respect to teacher attitudes. Significant investigations of the impact of personality characteristics of students on the formation of teacher attitudes (Martin, 1972; Brophy & Good, 1974; Helton, 1972; Good & Grouws, 1972) indicate the importance of the student personality variable. One series of investigations identified compliant and cooperative children as those whom teachers preferred (Good & Grouws, 1973). Studies by McDonald (1972), Nash (1973) Willis and Brophy (1974) and Power (1971) all agreed in finding that "attachment" students (students to whom teachers feel attached) tend to be conforming high achievers who were trusted and respected by teachers, got along well with teachers, and were subtly favored by teachers.

Silberman (1969,1971) reflected that "attachment" students are praised more intensively and more publicly as if they were

being held up as examples to their classmates. Also, although they were not called on more often, he believed that they were asked to share their ideas with the class more often. He also noted that they were criticized less harshly when they broke the rules. The data from the Student Attribute Study (Brophy et al, 1981) replicates and supports such findings. Teachers described the preferred students whom they ranked highly on the attachment scale as bright, quiet, well motivated, and helpful. They called on these students frequently in public response opportunity situations, were unusually open to their initiatives, likely to approve them and to assign them to special classroom tasks. In 1973, Brophy, Evertson, Good and Harris replicated the 1972 Good and Brophy study investigating whether a given child would trigger the same attitudes in two different teachers. Second grade teachers were asked to rate their students on a number of personality and behavioral attributes; they saw "attachment students" as helpful, neat, happy, attractive, mature and unlikely to be daydreaming. "Nonattachment" students tended to be described with contrasting characteristics. The results of Good and Brophy's work also suggest that this group of students may affect the attitudes of successive teachers similarly throughout school years. Although the favoritism or special interaction opportunities which "attachment students" receive is relatively subtle by comparison with students who are targets of other

teacher attitudes, much of it can be attributed to personal qualities of the students (Brophy et al, 1981).

In contrast to careful attempts to avoid showing favoritism toward "attachment" students, teachers in Silberman's study (1971) clearly and obviously showed hostility toward "rejection" students (students toward whom they felt rejection). Most of these students misbehaved often, which may have been the reason for teachers' rejection attitude. Silberman described them as almost continually "under surveillance" and described the teachers as quick to criticize or punish them for misbehavior. "Rejection" students received high rates of praise in addition to high rates of criticism.

The Good and Brophy (1972) data on "rejection" students bore out Silberman's description of these students as misbehaving. They appeared to be overactive and aggressive, compared with their classmates. Nash (1973) developed impressions of British teachers' reactions to rejected students and noted that rejection is revealed openly in classrooms. The teachers he observed regularly underestimated the abilities of these students, concentrated on isolating them and often tried to place them in special classes. Brooks and Wilson (1978), in a study of classroom proxemics, found that teachers tended to keep their distance from rejected students.

Willis and Brophy (1974) described "rejection" students as

restless, cheating, sassy, defiant, lazy, daydreaming, unhappy, . . . messy and immature. The rejection group of students in their study were seen almost completely negatively, even when objective facts did not support the perceptions.

Within the obvious contrasts of students characteristics and teachers' interactions between "attachment" and "rejection" students, are further interesting differences within each of the teacher attitude target groups. Data on girls in the attachment group is almost completely positive, while boys have been described as busybodies, physically immature, likely to have physical problems and not working up to their abilities. The data also suggests slightly more teacher favoritism for boys than girls (Willis & Brophy, 1974; Brophy & Good, 1974).

Teachers' descriptions of both boys and girls in the rejection group were unremittingly negative. Only one positive descriptor was used for this student group, that is, "rejection" girls were called alert observers. Little discrimination in teacher behavioral response to boys and girls in rejection groups has been reported.

Within this growing body of research on teacher attitudes and expectations, there is a considerable lack of study directed at teacher physical and personality qualities and characteristics. In one study, students have described teachers with these characteristics, and relationships established with

teaching effectiveness ratings by students. For example, attractive teachers, especially those who were young, were rated as superior teachers in the 1978 study (Irilli, Kehle & Guidubaldi).

The present study explores teachers' descriptions of themselves and of children to whom they are attached and for whom they feel rejection. The potential contribution of these data is indicated by this study's novel characteristics: the inclusion of both teacher self-perception and description of students, of both physical and personality characteristics, and by a consideration of all elementary grade levels (K-6). These components of the study combine with a considerable sample to provide preliminary data suggesting future directions for research in teacher/student interactions. This study nudges the profession concerning the source of differential teacher attitudes and behavioral communication of those attitudes. Are teachers attracted to children with traits similar to those with which they describe themselves? Do teachers establish different relationships with children who possess characteristics that they perceive lacking in themselves? Such questions suggest professional awareness and study with new direction of the inequalities of teacher/student interactions. Concerns for this aspect of classroom life point to the need for focused investigation of the origin and formation of teacher attitudes toward individual students. Such a research agenda can initially concentrate on student charac-

teristics as potentially powerful variables in the attitude formation process.

Methodology

Subjects

Forty-two elementary classroom teachers from 16 different schools representing two public school districts and one private school were interviewed. The schools selected for the study represented a cross section of socio-economic levels in a mid-western suburban community. Teachers were randomly selected to represent different grade levels, districts and a balanced sampling of public and private insitutions. The sample included 11 male and 31 female teachers, an overly optimistic representation of current teacher gender mix in elementary schools. Two hundred and fifty-two students were identified by the teachers in the study. Students from each grade level (K-6) were included.

Instrument

The research instrument was composed of student identification questions and descriptive checklists. The first section consisted of two questions from Silberman's 1969 instrument which assesses teacher attitudes. Teachers were asked to identify three students to whom they were attached and three students for whom they felt rejection. The questions were:

- 1) If you could keep 3 children in your class for another year for "the sheer joy of it", whom would you keep?
- 2) If your class was overcrowded and you could release 3 children to go to another class, whom would you release?

Student targets of attachment are identified by teachers in response to question 1; student targets of rejection are identified by teachers in response to question 2.

The second section asked teachers to describe the identified students by means of adjective checklists. Separate checklists containing physical descriptors and personality descriptors were developed to reflect the findings of previously described investigations (Good and Brophy, 1972; Brophy, Evertson, Anderson & Crawford, 1981).

The checklist was pretested in a norming study with education faculty and students. The norming sample rated each adjective for affect (positive or negative) and clarity of definition; only those adjectives for which there was consensus of meaning and affect were used in the checklists.

 INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Procedures

The instrument was administered to the 42 elementary

teachers. After identifying student targets of attachment and rejection, teachers were then asked to describe each student with 5 personality descriptors and 5 physical descriptors. Two months after the initial administration, teachers were asked to describe themselves using identical physical and personality checklists.

Analysis

The sets of data will be examined for the following information:

1. Most and least common descriptors teachers use to describe themselves, student targets of attachment and student targets of rejection;
2. Patterns in matches between teachers' self descriptions and descriptions of student targets of attachment and rejection;
3. Comparisons of attitude groups of students in relation to teacher selection of positive and negative descriptors;
4. Differences in student choices between male and female teachers with respect to sex of student in each of the attitude groups.

Data on most and least common descriptors will be reported as proportions, and differences in rate of selection between the teacher attitude groups will be described. The significance of patterns in matches between teachers' self descriptions and description of students will be determined, and the relationship

between number of matches in the teacher attitude groups will be examined. The significance of differences between male and female teachers on sex of student choices and use of positive/negative characteristics will be computed with a chi square statistic. A two way ANOVA statistic will be used to analyze patterns of matches between male and female teachers.

Results

The results of this study are reported in four groups. For the first group, the following information is reported: the traits that teachers as a group feel they do and do not exhibit; the general traits of those children named by teachers as children to whom they are attached and whom they reject; those traits which are the most disparate between the two groups of children. Finally inferential tests are performed dealing with trends in the data as they relate to differences in teacher sex and student attachment and/or rejection.

Table 2 shows the five most frequent and least frequent descriptors that teachers assign to themselves. Note that the most frequent descriptors are positive while the least frequent are negative.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

Tables 3 and 4 represent the five most frequent and least frequent descriptors of the children selected by teachers as attachment and rejection students respectively. Again note that for attachment students the most common traits are positive and the least common traits are negative. For the rejection students the pattern is less clear, though more negative traits do appear as frequent descriptors of these children. Also for the attachment students 7 out of the 10 most frequent traits are identical to the descriptors that teachers frequently apply to themselves. For the rejection students the corresponding ratio is 4 out of 10.

 INSERT TABLES 3 AND 4 HERE

A more striking picture of the differences in the descriptions of attachment and rejection students can be seen by noting those traits in which the difference in rate of selection between the two groups is greatest. For instance the descriptors healthy, neat, and energetic are the most frequent traits mentioned for both attachment and rejection students, leading one to conclude that teachers perceive the two groups are being quite physically similar. This conclusion might be confounded because most school children tend to be healthy and energetic and in some

schools also neat. Conversely, although the traits restless, dull, and insecure have much lower overall frequencies than the previous three traits, they are mentioned far more frequently, 49%, 26% and 37% respectively for rejection students than attachment students. Table 5 shows those traits which represent the maximum difference in frequencies between attachment and rejection students.

 INSERT TABLE 5 HERE

A second group of data includes the number of matches between traits used by each teacher to describe himself/herself and the traits used to describe attachment and rejection students. The design was a 2 (sex of teacher) x 2 (type of student) mixed factorial with type of student as a within subject factor. There was a significant main effect for type of student, $F(1,40) = 43.16$, $p < .01$. No other results reached significance. This result was due to more matches for "attachment" students than for "rejection" students.

 INSERT TABLE 6 HERE

For the third group of data, a chi square test was performed to determine if teachers described attachment students with relatively more positive traits than they used to describe rejection students, $\chi^2(3) = 857.79$, $p < .01$. Table 7 shows these proportions.

 INSERT TABLE 7 HERE

For the final group of data, two chi square tests were run to determine if the sex of the teacher was related to the sex of attachment and rejection students. For attachment students, $\chi^2(3) = 5.15$, $p < .11$. For rejection students, $\chi^2(3) = 19.70$, $p < .01$. Table 8 shows these proportions.

 INSERT TABLE 8 HERE

Discussion

Data on most and least common descriptors which teachers use to describe themselves can be explained in several different ways. It may be that teaching attracts healthy, neat, energetic, well-dressed, cooperative, sociable, happy, friendly and optimistic people. It is far more plausible that these characteristics are socially valued by most people and teachers are no exception. A more intriguing view of the data may be developed by studying a commonly accepted form of teacher evaluation - personality rating scales. It may be that teachers have been socialized by school district value systems to the extent that they perceive themselves in terms of frequently evaluated characteristics. Only one characteristic found in the group of most common descriptors teachers use to describe themselves isn't positive; previous explanations for most common descriptors aren't relevant for overweight, which 36% of teachers used in their self-descriptions. Without verifying this perception with outside observers, it is posed that this percentage reflects another societal value, that of being slim. It may be those teachers view themselves as not slim and so chose overweight.

The contrast in most and least common traits for attachment and rejection students upholds most of the research findings on

teacher attitude groups. Attachment students are positively described, and negative characteristics are infrequently used to describe them. Rejection students received generally positive physical traits and generally negative personality traits in teachers' descriptions in this study. As previously noted, the difference in rate of selection of certain characteristics between attachment and rejection students magnifies the differences in teachers' descriptions of the groups. The set of characteristics found in Table 5 are more illustrative of differences between "attachment" and "rejection" students than the sets of most and least descriptors for both attitude groups (Tables 3,4). This set of traits are also those which would possibly affect classroom life and may result in different teacher attitudes.

The most novel aspect of the data is the number of matches between traits used in teachers' self-descriptions and those used to describe "attachment" and "rejection" students. Globally overall matches between teachers' self-descriptions and descriptions of students were not significant. However, when viewed in terms of the attitude groups individually, it is evident that teachers describe "attachment" students more like themselves than they describe "rejection" students. Again the influence of socially valued traits may be part of teachers' descriptions of

students to whom they are attached. As the literature reports, teachers openly express dislike for "rejection" students so it is not surprising to find less positive and more negative traits in their descriptions. It is also not conflicting to report fewer matches between teachers' self-descriptions and descriptions of "rejection" students.

Additional expansion of these trends is possible by viewing the affect quality of a teacher's self-description and of the students in both attitude groups. Profiles of two of the teachers illustrate the possibility of additional trends through further analysis. Teacher A chose nine positive traits in his/her self-description and had a mean number of matches with "attachment" students of seven and with "rejection" students of one. Teacher B chose six negative traits in his/her self-descriptions and had a mean number of matches with "attachment" students on one and with rejection students of 3.5. Further analysis may reveal that teachers who perceive themselves in positive terms are attracted to students like themselves, while teachers who describe themselves in negative terms may reject students like themselves. The latter relationship may cause conflict and tension in teacher/student interaction, and affect self-concepts of both teacher and student.

Data displayed in Table 7 further intensifies the obvious differences in teachers' perceptions of the two student groups. Surprisingly, "rejection" students received a relatively close proportion of both positive and negative descriptors. Most of the research literature has shown almost completely negative descriptors of these students by teachers. Generally those findings come from open-ended interviews with teachers. This study's data forced teachers to use adjectives on the checklists; however, equal numbers of positive and negative traits were available for teachers' choices. The balance of positive and negative descriptors for "rejection" students may also be explained by the fact that four of the five most common physical descriptors of "rejection" students were positive, while only one of the five most common personality descriptors was positive. This difference confirms Brophy's (1981) contention that student physical traits do not influence teacher attitudes or interactions to a great extent.

Additional interpretation of the data in Table 7 may come from the idea that humans generally are quite clear about their "likes" but not so definite in their "dislikes". Teachers also may not be so comfortable with defining their "dislikes".

The final set of data is examined in terms of differences

between male and female teachers in their choice of students for the attitude groups. It appears that female teachers are attached to equal numbers of male and female students, but reject many more males than females. In contrast, male teachers are attached to significantly more female students and reject significantly more male students. Again a number of explanations exist. Female students are socialized from a young age to behave in ways that are valued in classroom situations, consequently appear more as "attachment" students than "rejection" students. Elementary age female students have "played school" for years and have a positive attitude toward school activities.

The data in Table 8 may cause doubt for the popular argument that there should be more male teachers in elementary classrooms to provide role models and support for elementary male students. Both attachment and rejection data for male teachers suggests that they favor female students and reject significantly more male students. This raises a serious question about their influence on and interaction with male students.

At this point, most of the study's data reflects the need for further analysis and possibly additional information. Especially interesting are the potential trends in matches between teachers' self-descriptions and descriptions of students to

whom they feel attached and for whom they feel rejection.

Further analysis of the affect of the matches and of the specific traits which frequently match will add specificity to the trends. Additional differences may be found in the data on grade levels, between public and private settings and between districts.

On a global level, the data points to the need for increased teacher awareness of both likes and dislikes in students, in physical and personality characteristics, and in traits perceived in self. Significant research (Flanders, 1970; Brophy & Good, 1974; Reed & Goetz, 1980; Allen, Domash & Goetz, 1976) has indicated that teacher awareness is sufficient to effect changes in teachers. Teachers generally express concern when faced with information on their interaction inequalities, along with frustration at trying to change within the complexities and pace of classroom life. Self-awareness combined with identification of students for whom teachers have attitudes of attachment or rejection, and characteristics of those same students may be an important recommendation for preservice and inservice agendas.

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TABLE 1

Physical Descriptors		
healthy	sickly	unattractive
agile	tall	unkempt appearance
good looking	short	listless
slim	dark	well-dressed
overweight	energetic	pale
clumsy	neat appearance	small
poorly dressed	large	
Personality Descriptors		
sociable	serious	dull
happy	popular	unfriendly
bored	pessimistic	cautious
friendly	leader	calm
alert	uncooperative	unsociable
confident	optimistic	unpopular
impulsive	follower	cooperative
laughing	enthusiastic	restless
sad	insecure	

TABLE 2

Proportion of Most Common and
Least Common Traits for Teachers

Rank	Physical		Personality	
	Most common	Least common	Most common	Least common
1	Healthy (76%)	Unkept (0%)	Cooperative (57%)	Popular(0%)
2	Neat (67%)	Listless(0%)	Sociable (50%)	Unsociable (0%)
3	Energetic(64%)	Sickly (02%)	Happy (48%)	Sad (0%)
4	Well-Dressed (38%)	Dark (05%)	Friendly (48%)	Unfriendly (0%)
5	Overweight (36%)	Unattractive (05%)	Optimistic(36%)	Dull (02%)

Note. N=42 Teachers

TABLE 3

Proportion of Most Common and
Least Common Traits for Attachment Children

Rank	Physical		Personality	
	Most common	Least common	Most common	Least common
1	Healthy (79%)	Clumsy (02%)	Happy (65%)	Bored (01%)
2	Neat (74%)	Sickly (02%)	Friendly (65%)	Uncooperative (01%)
3	Good-Looking (65%)	Unkempt (04%)	Sociable (47%)	Unfriendly(01%)
4	Energetic(58%)	Unattractive (04%)	Enthusiastic (44%)	Unsociable(01%)
5	Well-dressed (43%)	Listless (04%) Overweight(04%)	Alert (38%)	Pessimistic (01%)

Note. N=126 Students

TABLE 4

Proportion of Most Common and Least
Common Traits for Rejection Children

Rank	Physical		Personality	
	Most common	Least common	Most common	Least common
1	Healthy (52%)	Overweight(8%)	Restless (47%)	Optimistic(01%)
2	Neat (42%)	Sickly (09%)	Insecure (46%)	Popular (04%)
3	Energetic(38%)	Large (09%)	Impulsive (46%)	Cooperative (06%)
4	Slim (35%)	Dark (13%)	Sociable (42%)	Leader (06%)
5	Unkempt (30%)	Unattractive (16%) Listless (16%)	Uncooperative (36%)	Serious (06%) Enthusiastic (06%)

Note. N=126 Students

TABLE 5

Mean Proportional Difference Between
Traits for Attachment and Rejection Students

Rank	Personality		Physical	
	Attach-Reject	Reject-Attach	Attach-Reject	Reject-Attach
1	Cooperative (49%)	Restless (49%)	Good-looking (39%)	Listless (26%)
2	Happy (45%)	Impulsive(42%)	Neat (32%)	Unkempt (26%)
3	Enthusiastic (38%)	Insecure (37%)	Healthy (27%)	Clumsy (19%)
4	Friendly (35%)	Uncooperative (35%)	Energetic (20%)	Unattractive (12%)
5	Confident (29%)	Dull (26%)	Well-dressed (10%)	Pale (10%)

Note. N=252 Students

TABLE 6

Mean Number of Matches Arrayed
by Sex of Teacher and Type of Student

Type of Student	Sex of Teacher	
	Male	Female
Attachment	11.18 (6.24)	12.70 (4.73)
Rejection	7.45 (4.15)	7.22 (2.47)

Note. Standard Deviations in Parentheses

TABLE 7

Mean Proportion of Positive and Negative
Traits Ascribed to Attachment and Rejection Students

Students	Descriptors	
	Positive	Negative
Attachment	.47	.03
Rejection	.23	.27

TABLE 8
Mean Proportion of Male and Female Attachment and
Rejection Students Selected by Male and Female Teachers

Students	Teachers	
	Male	Female
Attachment		
Male	.15	.25
Female	.35	.25
Rejection		
Male	.33	.36
Female	.17	.14